



Anomalous #1

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Bread Alley

Sarah Tourjee

The window was watching her. The stalker was watching her objective through a window. Objective was watching a window through the stalker. Detailed kidnapping started preconceived drawings. The preconceived kidnapping started with detailed drawings. The portraits were produced in charcoal and the smallest drop of blood. Detailed with preconceived, the drawings started kidnapping. Through her the stalker was a window-watching objective.

Charcoal produced the smallest portrait of blood. The drops were the smallest blood, and in charcoal portraits produced. Stalker had 17 humans, old and stolen. The lure was an alley into bread. A piece of bread was used to lure the subject into an alley. The stalker was 17 years old and had never stolen a human. 17 was an old human. The victim ate into the trap and walked.

A subject of the piece was bread alley and a used lure. Bread an alley to lure a piece into the subject. An alley was used to lure into the subject of bread. The victim walked into the trap unwittingly and ate greedily. Greedily and unwittingly ate the trap into the victim. Why? cried mouth. I just wanted a boyfriend, said the stalker, that's all. The stalker cocooned in her catch. 17 years stolen, a human was the stalker. Old and stalker had a human.

The stalker cocooned her catch in duct tape for the journey home. And greedily walked the victim. Journey for the home duct. The duct in the journey for her catch cocooned. Her stalker catch-tape cocooned. Co-

cooned in tape, journey the duct for her home the stalker. Home duct for the journey cocooned in her. Catch the stalker! cocooned the tape. Her new mate kept screaming so the stalker showed him the portraits until he was still. That's all I wanted, said the stalker. Produced were the smallest blood drops. This was the captive's doing.

Objective the window, a stalker was through watching. The kidnapper's lair had been decorated for two. When the captive's mouth was untaped, he cried, why are you doing this? Are you the captive's mouth? he cried, when this doing was untaped. The wanted stalker said, just a boyfriend, that's all. All boyfriends wanted just a stalker. Two had been decorated for kidnappers.

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When the captives cried, the mouth was doing this untaped. Kidnapper's decorated lair for two. The portraits still new and kept. Blood were the portraits and charcoal drop-in. Portrait-blood the smallest produced the charcoal drop. The portraits showed him screaming until he was new. The stalker cocooned in her catch. I just wanted a boyfriend that's all stalker. Her mate showed him the stalker so the screaming kept still.

The stalker home in her catch. Kidnapping preconceived. Lair decorated. The stalker had a human. Stolen years had 17. Are you the captive's mouth? You are he when the untaped captive's was, why this? Bread the subject. Into the subject lure the bread. The subject was used to bread. The victim ate. The trap ate the victim. The mouth cried. The stalker kept him. That's a boyfriend, said the stalker. The new mate kept screaming until the stalker was he.

What It Means

Sarah Tourjee

They were the most vile scenarios — “Like a dog now.” “No, no, *you’re* to be the dog,” and so on until I awoke, my face red and hot, my palms clammy, and the sheets twisted up in my fists.

A dream, I consoled myself and my eyes confirmed my surroundings. The numbers, 4:03, glowed red on my bureau next to the framed pictures of my grandchildren, and the dusty rosary beads that had settled long ago in the left corner.

A dream, thank heavens. But a dream says something about you, doesn’t it? Something you can’t edit. Something you won’t edit. Something I ate maybe — that bit of chocolate only 30 minutes before bed. I’ve been warned against it, maybe I asked for it. But what does that mean if I know that to eat the chocolate is to ask for something unpleasant, and then to go on and eat the chocolate anyway? Is it the sweet I’m after or the consequence?

My husband’s been dead ten years and we never did it that way. But maybe we both thought about it all those 49 years, subconsciously, and it’s taken 59 for it to finally bubble up. If I’d died yesterday, as I was surely just as likely to do as not at this point, I’d never have known about this thing that had been in my brain for 59 years. And he never knew. Maybe he knew that *he* was thinking about it, but surely never that *I* was thinking about it, since I didn’t even know. Maybe for years it was on the tip of his tongue — “like a dog now” — oh but what a horrid thought, that I might have been married to someone who was always wanting to say “like a dog now” and never getting to say it.

But well, I'm sure he never was just about to say it. He was not like that. We were not like that. We made a history of reading minds, of walking into a room and not speaking and then giving the other what they wanted. We stopped going to mass but never talked about why. Just one day stopped going because we had both, we both knew, woken up that morning and felt that all that praying had not gotten us here. We had gotten us here, and so there we stayed that morning.

I remembered this when my husband was dying and I thought I would not pray for him. I would not make this the moment. I would just think of him as he had made himself, and as we had made ourselves. But at night I had lay in bed alone, as he was in the hospital, and could not stop myself from imagining what it would be like without him, that sleeping would be like this every night. That the mornings would be quiet, deliberate, and the afternoons, and the evenings, and on and on, and that it could be possible I would go entire days without looking into a person's face and knowing I had something to give them. A great panic overtook me, and as there was nothing else I could do, I prayed.

Still he died. And since no one else could read my mind, I had to learn to say the words if I meant to communicate something. If I wanted someone to know that I had a dream about mating as dogs do, I would not call my children about this subject, but perhaps a friend, and for a long time I would be quiet, trying to think of the words, hoping also that she would understand without me speaking. When she did not understand the silence, I would open my mouth and say, well, I would end up saying something about my grandchildren, or her grandchildren, or my loose knees, or her stiff back. Though now there are fewer and fewer people to call, and they will continue to diminish the more years I live.

If he were here, I'd have turned in bed and looked at him and he'd have looked at me. He'd have known about the dream, and we'd have laughed. "Just a dream," he'd have said. We'd have sipped tea all morning then, not thinking of the dream, or perhaps we'd have enacted it — both of us the dog, each making space for the other.

Everything, Perfectly, Forever

Kendra Greene

Mr. T is the reason I started sending Christmas cards. Well, Mr. T with the help of Nancy Reagan. And, true, it wasn't Mr. T the man himself so much as his appearance with the first lady in one particular photograph, but the point is: that was enough. The point is: I saw something in an archive and it changed me.

6

Everyone walking the archives, those white-washed basement levels of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, is either an employee or a guest escorted by an employee. It is the kind of vast and silent place where you could go half an hour without bumping into anyone at all. The archives themselves are a series of cloisters: papers slipped in mylar sleeves, sleeves packed in boxes, boxes stacked on shelves. Only a tattoo of neatly written alpha-numeric code on the boxes and shelves interrupts the uniform anonymity. Even I needed a barcode before I could enter, a paper sticker I pressed high on my shirt like a nametag. My brother wore his similarly and we both, once the elevator doors opened, stayed close on the heels of one Ray Wilson, a tall, late-30s man who wore his barcode on the back of a Staff ID.

I'd met Ray Wilson shortly after I was hired to manage a Chicago museum's collection of 8,000 photographs. Ray was an audio-visual archivist from Simi Valley more concerned with film and negatives, but our respective employers both thought we'd benefit from a week at the Eastman House in Rochester, New York, so there we were at the Image Permanence Institute taking notes about silvering and foxing and what little could be done about either. Ray Wilson had perhaps

been kidding when he suggested from the remote distance of professional courtesy and three thousand miles from home that I should, at some unspecified date, if I was ever in California, come by the archives. Still, he was in every way cordial when I called six months later to announce my visit.

“Great,” Ray said. “So what do you want to see?”

I had only one request.

“I want to see the picture you can’t talk about.”

*

Archives are different from museum collections. Collections expect to make some few select things accessible to a wide audience, while archives are essentially the reverse: a mass of information protected so that an individual researcher might wade about and uncover something of interest. Collections anticipate exhibition. Archives prioritize preservation. Sure, they both exist for study and enlightenment, but they operate on different theories of how to get there.

7

Archivists, the joke goes, want to preserve everything, perfectly, forever—even if maintaining that level of preservation means none of it will ever be seen again. When I first met Ray Wilson, he was talking to a grey-haired conservator about the gems in their respective collections. I remember they were laughing. I don’t know what Ray told her about the photograph he will never discuss, but I will tell you what Ray then told me when I asked: the picture is of the president. It was taken at the White House. Beyond that, Ray mostly told me what the picture isn’t. The picture is not one of the 8x10 reproduction glossies on file by year or subject in the library archives. It was never

published. It does not circulate. It has never been requested. And Ray, who had no particular loyalties to the ex-president before he started working at the archive, intends to keep it that way.

When I landed at LAX, my brother was waiting. Gavin was born two months before Carter won the 1976 election, some three and a half years before the spring Reagan swept the primaries and I was born. It's because of Gavin I grew up watching *He-Man* and *The A-Team* and listening to Weird Al Yankovic and reading *Mad Magazine*. It is surely, somehow, because of those credentials that I invited him to go see a picture that could not be discussed. I tossed my suitcase and my winter coat in the back seat of his car. I stood for a moment in the L.A. air, decided to pull off a sweater, and climbed in the front seat.

"Jelly bean?" my brother offered, extending a tiny silver tin.

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"Why thank you, Gavin," I said, pinching out an orange bean. "How very appropriate."

He smiled, taking a green one for himself. He checked the mirrors.

"You know," he said as I slipped on my sunglasses, the little white car now pointed towards the hills. "I don't really remember much about the Reagan administration."

"Me neither," I said.

"And, frankly, I don't really like libraries."

"That's okay," I nodded. "This, well, I think this might be different."

*

The entrance of the Ronald Reagan Library offers two paths. The

left doorway enters a sunny gift shop with presidential magnets and presidential coloring books and presidential china and presidential everything in tiers and racks and gleaming rows. The right doorway is darkened, goes into the museum. Between the two entries, completely hidden, is the elevator that goes down to the archives.

“Ray said to give you these,” the receptionist said when we announced ourselves. We looked down at a pair of museum tickets, looked back up confused and heads cocked. “Have a look around the museum,” she instructed us, “and when you’re done, I’ll call him up from the archives.” I assumed it was a professional courtesy, an act of good hosting, a you’ve-come-all-this-way bonus. Now I wonder if it was a hedge. Maybe Ray didn’t think there was enough in the archives to sustain our interest. Maybe he thought some background would do us good. Probably Ray was just busy with other things, but it felt like he was stalling, making us work, trying to bury the remarkable under what any tourist could see. Either way, we did as we were told.

9

We could have been more reverent. “That chair!” I would exclaim, pulling Gavin’s arm, “He sat in *that* chair!” Then, around the next turn, “That pen!” I would squeal, “He signed something with that *pen*!” Maybe it had been the president’s favorite chair or a pen that signed something important, but the label text wasn’t letting on. As far as we could tell, it was just case after case of suits and desks and a few random gifts from other heads of state, all now on black velvet because a certain man had touched them. They might have been more interesting had we yet realized, in this place where Ronald Reagan’s official biography failed to mention his first marriage, how telling a silence can be.

The signature item at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and

Museum is Air Force One. It is what most visitors go to see. It has its own line on the green and white freeway signs announcing the exit for the museum. And it has its own room in the museum, the nose of the aircraft pointed to a four-story wall of windows, poised as if it might yet break the glass and soar out over the canyon. Video screens lining the queue to enter Air Force One recount its history, show people breaking into tears, a pilot reading a poem he wrote. Just before you enter the plane, you are asked to turn your back to it, stand there framed by the oval entry, and smile for the camera. It's optional, but if you say no, you'll be asked again. When you decline a second time, the photographer will remind you that there's no obligation to buy, no risk at all—you're just having your picture taken. He will give you a reassuring smile that this is routine, part of the experience, integral to it. And when you say once more, returning his genuine smile, that you simply don't need a picture, he will all but shake his head.

By the time Gavin and I had convinced the photographer we actually were going to pass on the picture, that it simply wasn't an image we needed to see much less keep, the visitors in front of us were about ready to exit the plane. As we stepped in, a grandfather and his grandson stopped the line behind us. The white-haired man leaned down, his arm around the boy, and the photographer raised his lens.

At the front of the plane Gavin and I saw The Football—the black briefcase with its red button which accompanied the president every day for eight years, omnipresent, lest he need to authorize a nuclear attack while away from his desk. It is known also as the Nuclear Football, the Atomic Football, the President's Emergency Satchel, The Button, The Red Button, The Black Box. During the whole administration it was never out of the control of a military aide, and now it is secured

from the general public by an eighth of an inch of plexiglass. Gavin and I bowed our heads to see it better, leaned into the curve of the cabin. Of course this device was lifeless now, inert, but it was still something overwhelming: the power to devastate life as we know it, weighing in at just 45 pounds, and sized to fit in a carry-on.

“Hurry up!” the docent called to us from the back of the plane. “That’s right,” she said when we looked up. We turned to look behind us and saw no one. She waved us down as if we’d created a bottleneck and hordes of anxious tourists were clamoring to get by. “Come on, now.”

So we hurried up. We scurried past the leather-upholstered lounge of the president and his aides, we skimmed past the block of press corps seats tucked closer together, and at the back of the plane we saw a kitchenette. “This is the Air Force One galley,” the docent smiled. “The president always made sure to find out if anyone flying Air Force One was celebrating a birthday that day. And if someone was, there was a chocolate cake!” It was only the three of us in the entire length of the plane. “Do you have any questions?”

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“So, *everyone* who had a birthday got chocolate cake?” I asked.

“Everyone,” she beamed. The woman was old enough to have voted for Reagan, and something about the crispness of her shirt and gold of her necklace made me suspect she had. She seemed particularly pleased to share the cake story, giddy almost, as if it were a secret, as if everything we needed to know about President Reagan had just been revealed.

“What if the birthday person was allergic to chocolate cake?” I asked.

“Oh, I am sure the president would check beforehand and get a different kind.”

I tried to imagine the leader of the free world attending not only to the date of birth but also the potential cake-related allergies of every passenger who might occupy the same plane he was on. The docent assured me it was true.

“He was very thoughtful,” she stressed. “The president was *very* thoughtful.”

*

Ray Wilson was also very thoughtful. Once we had seen Air Force One and Christmas Trees of the World and everything else the museum had to offer, Ray met us in the lobby as promised, asked if we wanted a drink of water or a bite to eat, and escorted us to the staff elevator. We tried to be equally polite as he showed us through the stacks and the shelves of the archives, even if it mostly looked like a lot of white boxes.

Not every president gets a library, just the 13 starting with Herbert Hoover. It's as if you need a critical mass of papers to get a library, and each administration produces, and proceeds to preserve, more than the last. The Reagan library, for its part, holds 50 million pages of presidential documents, half a million feet of motion picture film, and tens of thousands of audio and videotapes. Among its holdings of 1.6 million photographs, are two tan, four-drawer filing cabinets. They house the celebrity and VIP pictures in manila file folders. Ray stopped our tour there.

“Who do you want to see?” he asked after explaining the content of the cabinets.

Gavin and I tried to think of famous people from the '80s, but all we

could come up with was Mikhail Gorbachev and Pee Wee Herman.

“Okay,” Ray said. “I’ll flip through the files, and you tell me when you want to see something.” We figured we could do that. “1981 Miss Universe Shawn Weatherly?” Ray said. “Muhammad Ali? Lucille Ball? William F. Buckley?” He read through Kirk Cameron, Walter Cronkite, Phyllis Diller, Joe DiMaggio, but we weren’t ready to commit. The questions faded into statements. “Cary Grant. Billy Graham. Wayne Gretzky.” Gavin and I weren’t especially particular, but we were hoping for something unexpected. We passed on Bob Hope, Luciano Pavarotti, Mary Lou Retton, and I was starting to wonder if we should pick something, anything, just to be polite. “Schwarzenegger, Arnold. Selleck, Tom,” Ray was saying. “Frank Sinatra?” he asked with a wink. The wink meant nothing to me or to Gavin, and after a pause Ray went on. “Jimmy Stewart. Mr. T...”

13

It seemed impossible that Ray had just said *Mr. T*—said it as if there was nothing more natural to come across in the Reagan archives, as if Mr. T had been the Vice President or the Chief of Staff. Ray was calling out Mother Teresa and Margaret Thatcher and Cheryl Tiegs by time we collected ourselves enough to say, louder than we intended, “Stop!”

“John Travolta?” Ray asked, his finger on the folder tab.

“No,” we said in unison. “Mr. T!”

*

There was only one picture in the folder: a glossy 8x10 with a white border. Mr. T was wearing a Santa suit with the arms ripped off. Nancy Reagan sat on his knee, her pointy-toed flats dangling above his

duct-taped combat boots. There was a Christmas tree behind them, the old-fashioned kind with hundreds of thin white candles at the tips of its boughs, and Nancy Reagan rather absently held at her side what I can only assume she had been hoping Santa T would deliver to a good girl like herself: a two-foot tall Mr. T doll, grimacing from behind the cellophane cut-out of a cardboard box emblazoned with the A-Team logo and images of its soldier of fortune characters firing automatic weapons. The first lady and Mr. T both seemed distracted, unprepared for the camera, yet there were Nancy Reagan's lips frozen against Mr. T's forehead in a permanent, passionless peck.

14 It was stunning. It had overtones of tradition and rebellion and violence and tenderness and abstinence and indulgence and entertainment and grace. It was the lion lying down with a lamb. It was *I pity the fool* and *Just Say No*. It was two members of the Screen Actors' Guild who might have more in common than I'd thought. I turned to my brother, both of us wide-eyed, open mouths starting to pull into grins. He hugged me and I hugged back. The picture wasn't just funny and odd and surprising—it was sublime in a way that spoke, if not directly to the season, then at least to everyone in my address book. It was perfect. It was not the picture I had come to see.

The picture I went there for was in fact rooms and hallways and more rooms away, unannounced, like a crate in the infinite warehouse at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The picture I went there for, the picture Ray Wilson will never discuss, is in fact three pictures, proofs on a contact sheet taken in quick succession. Ray showed them to us on the condition that we not reveal their specifics. After we saw them, Gavin and I were escorted out.

I should say there is nothing scandalous about these pictures. They

are, in fact, endearing. That there even *is* a code of silence—or that *these* should be the pictures to trigger it—is far more interesting than what little the hush conceals. What I can say, what I think it is okay to tell, is this: Ray imagines that before the pictures were taken, the President of the United States said to his staff photographer, “Be prepared when I come in that door. I am only going to do this once.” I imagine Ray is right. I imagine it happened exactly like that. And I try to imagine how many things are only seen once.

Boys' Bathroom

Kendra Greene

There are no windows in the Boys' Bathroom. There is no ventilation, either, which means it can get stifling warm, and some days there are so many people jockeying for space, that I have to collect my things and find somewhere else to work. Usually, though, I sit in there with my papers completely alone except for the occasional person who pushes the door open and then, seeing me, blushes and ducks out again.

Listen to the full audio essay on our [website](#).

Sleepless

Patrick Swaney

The tumble of drinks and conversation is enough to wake me. The man and his pet possum are back on my porch. This is the third night in a row. I'm carrying my flashlight. I flip the outside switch anyway, with what I hope is authority, and the porch goes quiet. Somehow I feel like I'm interrupting. The possum is in my rocking chair, his tail wrapped around a cigarette. He smokes casually. The man clutches to the railing nearly upside down. I squint at the scene. The amount of scotch left in the bottle tells me it's late. It's late, I say, I was sleeping. I ask the man and his possum to leave. The man tries to answer but his upside down words come out garbled. The possum gives me a glowing look that tells me they will not. I point the flashlight at each of them, but the effect is lost in the illuminated porch. Come on, I say, this is unreasonable. But the possum is unflappable. He takes a drag off his cigarette and pours the last of the scotch. A breeze comes up ticking the tall grass against the railing. The man sways a little. The possum offers me the drink. I decline. All I want is my bed. This is the last time, I tell them, as I latch the screen door. But no one believes me.

Corrections

Patrick Swaney

1. Speech Therapy

I went to the speech therapist because I needed to talk to someone. The speech therapist said my R's were soft. I said I just wanted to be able to talk to you again. She said try rolling your tongue toward the roof of your mouth and back. I said I couldn't stop thinking about you, that I needed to see you. Let's start with something easy, she said. Look. Like this, she opened her mouth wide: *red, red, red*, she repeated. I said I knew that you would want to see me too. Red, she said one more time, drawn out and exaggerated, rolling the R in her gaping mouth until it sounded less like a word and more like a color. I never meant to hurt you, I said. Yes that's it, she said. *Never*, she echoed, *hurt, hurt*. There were reasons, I said. *Good*, she said nodding, *very good*.

18

2. Crosswalk

They gave me responsibility. Corner of Central and 11th. Then assigned me a reflective vest and an orange belt. They gave me a small stop sign. They assigned me lunch, recess, and 3 o'clock. After school I held my arms out, surveyed the traffic, potential collisions. I took four steps into the intersection, placed myself between chaos and children. I waved my arm, urged the tiny crowd onward, herded that small crush of weightlessness. I returned to the curb. You tugged on my orange belt. You tugged on my reflective vest. You looked up at my face, squinted and asked, can I hold your sign? Hold it tightly, I said, bending toward you.

3. Playground

The playground was inevitable. Teeter-totter. Jungle gym. Monkey bars. Balance. My lap. Slide. Tunnel. Swings. Legs. Bare legs on plastic, metal, gravel. Bare. Skin. Balance. Merry-go-round. Your legs. Your hands. My lap. More skin. Arms. Talk. Say: isn't this nice? What a nice time we're having. Say: what should we do next? See-saw. Fireman's pole. Swing. Up and back. Hands tight on chains. Higher. Kick at the air. Head back. Hair in the sun. Upside down. Higher. Sweat. Smell. Slide. Slide. Swing. Say: you look so pretty. Is that a new dress? Are those new shoes? Say: what should we do next?

4. Comfort Food

At the pond I watched you dive. Shoulders pressed against your ears, hands overlapped in a lopsided peak, falling forward, just that way you were taught. You broke the shallow surface and were swallowed up to your ankles. A silhouette of mismatched feet hung for a moment, two peppermint buoys on the water, before they disappeared. I folded my hands, waiting for you to resurface, then went back to my house and fixed your favorite snack.

19

5. Tulip Time

I wore my costume because I was sure you'd like it. Pleated pantaloons, the shirt with too many oversized buttons, little hat, thick socks and wooden shoes. I hadn't put it on in years; it smelled like the inside of a windmill and fit poorly across my chest. I thought of your laugh, that small, easy chirp. I walked out of my house and into the street like I was part of the parade. I walked the painted center-

line past the chapel, followed the echo of my shoes then cut through the park, plucking a tulip from a newly bloomed bed as I went. Inside the chain link fence the elementary school playground was empty, and I felt unexpectedly embarrassed in my costume. I waited, rested my hand on the merry-go-round, felt the mid-day heat through the steel bar. Empty. On my hands and knees I sifted through playground pebbles, until I found your scattered blood. I placed the tulip on the ground, cupped the pebbles in my hands, brought them to my face and breathed.

Predictably

Patrick Swaney

“May I touch your foot?” I asked the man. I had taken a seat next to him on a bench, not far from a small lake. The man sat cross-legged and barefoot. “May I?” I repeated. The man had perfect soles, unblemished, the skin taut and stainless. He must have received this request fairly often. “Yes,” the man said. I touched the bottom of his right foot. It felt cool and smooth. Like polished glass, almost slippery. “It’s beautiful,” I said. “Thank you,” the man said. A couple paddled a canoe. Ducks shifted near the muddy shore. It was a pleasant day. My fingers tingled from touching the man’s sole. With soles like that, I thought, this man could walk on water. I imagined him with a running start from our bench to the lake; he would land on the water with a delicate splash and just keep going, skimming the surface, his feet like flat stones rippling past the ducks and canoe to the far shore where he would disappear into the trees. “Impossible,” I said. “Crawling,” the man said. “What?” I said. “I crawl everywhere. I haven’t walked since I was a little boy.” “Crawling?” I asked. “Look at my hands, my knees,” he said, “and see the tops of the toes drag some.” His hands and knees were pocked and calloused, scarred, nubbed and raw in places. They looked mangled. I hadn’t noticed before, but the man himself looked weathered and stooped, perhaps from so many years spent so close to the ground. “But your soles,” I said. “I know,” he said. “Like you could walk on water,” I said. “Yes,” the man said.

Alparegho, like nothing else

Ann Cefola translating the French of Hélène Sanguinetti

“There was a day, one time, now, the day of the King who lies, and his wife the Queen with the striking huge pupils. They surrounded their heads with streamers, put a little chair above above and a veil of orange skins on their teeth, and played fools. The people were hungry hungry hungry.

At this time the men took forks, the women had prepared flasks, and they entered in the park after having bent the high bars with their fists of rage, starved, “Justice! Justice! Treacherous you are!”

And again: “Justice! The treacherous, may they perish!”

Suddenly, someone, neither old nor young, left the crowd of those oppressed, he was not really really handsome, and even his body, in a bad sense human, only shoulder-height, on the right was a bit twisted and a little curved. He had a funny pickaxe with a golden edge and so small that it should have belonged to a child to play with in the sand, or had been made especially for a dwarf, or a sort of tool of a clock-maker or tapestry-maker? From what era? He turned it around in his hand with much dexterity despite his sick appearance and, with the other hand, easily opened a passage-way through the fury.

“I forgot my flute,” said he in a small voice that each one heard deep in the ear. It was a little golden voice, a little voice that insists on itself, and came from far away. He was standing at the foot of the park’s great bent grill and looked toward the house, on the balcony of honor, the

royal couple decked out with ribbons and staggered before the extent of such a disaster. Because the Majesties' beautiful garden had been devastated: crushed the flowerbeds, strangled the water jets, filled in the ponds, pulled out the varied magnolias and the-happiness-of-apes pines, suffocated the fountains. Worse than if a herd of wild boar had descended from the mountain.

Much worse!

It is said that sometimes, the eve of their death, the eyes of the great princes see the earth in its entire detail, and understand all that they never understood, but that this stays stuck under their tongue, or that they can't manage to translate what they're thinking for the first time in this totally new speech which has suddenly come to them. The king, above all, was affected and had a hard time battling this type of exhaustion which took all his body and spirit on this balcony! But the queen, like a little girl, shook her fists.

23

"I forgot my flute."

The man advanced all alone in the walkway edged with well-pruned trees, still spared by the crowd which was still growing, and he apologized with this voice pure and hoarse at once which came from behind the mountains and from deep within himself, and he waved his pickaxe in rhythm with his steps. Soon he was under the balcony himself, as if he had wanted to eye the queen's underwear, which did not show that day precisely, because it happened that, in order to play the fool, she wore an old pair of trousers.

"I forgot my flute." He raised his head, the sovereigns lowered their eyes, obeying their ears, *"I need your fingers, your Majesties, in order to play."*

This was scarcely murmured, gently requested.

The King, the moron, grew quiet, the Queen his wife stretched out her hands and the man, seizing them, jumped on the platform where already the moist shadow of evening was replacing the light, effortlessly he jumped up there, and smiled at the Medusa who stared at him, where existed such pupils, taking you down to the powder of your soul, down to the unreadable signs of the hear, Who could resist such a call from nothing, call of self across self, and from thousands of thousands of tons and tons of night, but her hands were soft and hot, like the air below, amidst the grasses of the great meadow, and the living water of the river. And still he smiled, responding to the pressure of the sovereign's fingers and saying in his little voice, little golden voice that insists on itself and came from far away:

"I forgot my flute, but I will play on your fingers, Majesty."

And the crowd grew more silent than silence in this instant. Only a child violently sneezed, or perhaps it was a train that passed just at this moment, shattering the evening.

Then the man with the slightly twisted shoulder bent a knee on the stone, put his mouth in the offered hands and we heard this: the voice of the queen with the striking huge pupils! Accusing:

- Who crushed the flowerbeds?

- Who strangled the water jets?
- Who filled in the ponds?
- Who pulled out the trees from two Jubilees?
- Who suffocated the fountains?

This is worse, much worse than if a herd of wild cats had swept through my country. Our country, Mister-Little-Pickaxe who forgot his flute!

But the queen, all the while scolding, held his hands, shaking them as if they were dancing a round.

Then we heard this:

"We're hungry, Madame, more hungry than hungry, and you forget us."

And the man put his mouth in her hands once more.

25

"You forget us! Forget us!" reprised the people, touched, in one voice, and this offered relief to hearts too hardened to let even a cry escape.

The queen understood none of this and threw her husband a brief look that informed her very quickly the type of help he would be able to provide her in such a thorny situation.

She did not understand what with so much rice distributed, so many gallons and gallons of oil, more virgin than the Virgin, so many miles of sugar cane, bags and bags of flour, so many bales of cotton.... No, she did not understand. They were hungry! Never had the country recorded such opulence. They were hungry! And didn't the progress realized

in only six months' time account for anything? The communications between the seas and the mountains, the new train that seemed to fly it went so high, and hygiene, the new hygiene plan, and the cock fights, and the police who walked barefoot and could recognize, even sing, the most beautiful operatic arias, was this worth nothing? Who had ordered that people could leave their cars and front doors open from now on, dismissed the local rulers and their servants, allowed four dogs and three cats per family and a portion offered of sgnult (yes, of Sgnult!) once a week, they were hungry!

"Yes, we are, Your Majesty, more hungry than hungry, Majesty, understand!"

It was then that these hands started to speak, or this mouth in these hands, each person shivered in hearing the very soft voice come round to the deep ear, as if made uniquely for each one.

"Yes, more hungry than hungry, immeasurably hungry, and however, it's true, we lack nothing, neither food, nor drink, each person has the portion that he needs, even more than he needs, each person is sensitive to the socio-economic progress, so evident and needed, Great Sovereign-on-the-Balcony, and each person is unhappy."

The shadow now occupied all the sky and this was the exact moment of evening when cascades of swallows suddenly grow quiet, leaving a great damp silence, a very strange and beautiful moment before the bats' troubled flight starts.

"Why are we so unhappy, Majesty?" reprised the voice light and grave, *"why are we so heavy and empty? so heavy from emptiness that the earth may soon capsize, so heavy that we will not be able to walk any-*

more, and even our looks will not serve us under melting eyelids, they are going within where nothing more pushes or passes. The women have brought their flasks, flasks full of the last air that remains for them, an air it is said made to purify the blood, to make it more shining, more alive than the sun. If you do nothing, they will open the flasks to the air and this will be the atrocious death that you will have caused. The men have brought forks, to resemble the Wicked in Pictures but they have no more strength, or enough that's needed to kill, when one is already dead, an arrow planted in our back during the round that night on the ramparts. If you do nothing, what will they do?

"They all came here they saw you playing, because they believed that you think of us behind your office, that you invent plans for love, meetings of looks, naïve days, great balloons of youth climbing the sky, ah Majesty, I am afraid very afraid suddenly of You and of the Words which are in me, informed from my depths and already ready for an unbelievable shape, so pure and so just that it will ravage time and space, and the world will be totally shaved, totally bared and no person will live, but an other universe would somewhere begin. It may be, do you know such pride? Or is it the fear of becoming the tip of an arrow blackened in the blood of the donkey asphyxiated by his ribs and flies, because I forgot my flute and I needed your fingers, majesty, to play, to give back the mysterious sense, thirst, hunger, the burning at noon under the roof's wisteria."

Everyone looked at the queen, at least the one who stayed during the night, on the balcony, and each person thought this sovereign had been very moved to a great degree because a mass like her head had collapsed, had slipped toward the bottom of her body that almost ren-

dered it tiny, really child-like. How to speak of the king who did not leave any trace, or was it this odor of powder that rose timidly from the ground and went away amidst the crowd then the sky?

The night was blue, silent and blue and immense.

When the little man woke up on the balcony, he clasped in his fingers a flute so beautiful and shining that he had the impression of holding a beating heart, or perhaps it was the beating of his heart that was the source, and so glittering, really so glittering this flute that it resembles some material from the night sky mislaid on earth, humbly illuminating its dawn.

“It’s dawn,” he said to himself.

And he bent over the balcony, flute mixed with fingers, and he bent over almost to the point of falling to witness this day, to be the mute child who traverses the voice of the world.

Polistes fuscatus

Alma Baumwoll

Local city builder,
large-stung seraphs of spit and gaster,

flexed faces of
war paint and the mother desires:

wait, do not
wait. has your hormone been segmented

from care?
has your season been cut from the time

you were born?
Goodbye to the natal nest's sorority;

press the wind,
hamuli strong, thread waist constricting

hemolymph to odd
arthropod proportions and tracheae.

It will be cold
without the trophallaxis.

It will be cold
sans mandibulation.

It will be cold
without the pairing of mate

to season and accumulation
of fat and flesh and skeletons of wood,

without the sisters
and the children and the children and

the larval pantry.

Ephemeroptera

Alma Baumwoll

Fire on the water.
Heart unreformed,

reforming, remolding,
boiling under the surface film-

thick barrier to release
egg, sperm, chitin cracked,

flying away. Surface tension:
enemy of explorer and horror

of pre-smoked lakes. Return
home and die in the flat

of the water, wings re-conjoined
from whence they came

thorax the motion
of quickdead twitch above

fertile film. Return
home and die in the flat,

explored land that holds
no new sights and nobody believes.

Phagocytes

Alma Baumwoll

I

Mama Metchnikoff will find you
and speak of you and praise you

even if you consume
only carmine flecks—one
man's moment of science,
and not the animalcule
panacea for us,
the poorly untranslucent.

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II

Translucent larvae
ingestions
of red—catching
the macrophage's pseudopod—
bottlecaps to a crow—
under the watchful eye
of Mama Metchnikoff.

O, unfortunately opaque puppies
that die,
diseased before immune design
could sketch their insides.

III

Fog-wraiths wander the body, presenting antigens, thoughts uncaught
by Mama Metchnikoff's starfish, sponges, children's stories:
wandering cells slay dragons and small pox and suicide.

You lovely lovers of splintered wood
that glom the invasion and destroy the protist!
So far from the first glimpse of your asteroidean home. . . .

Neutrophils and macrophages beyond the imagining—
Engulf and bind the phagosome!
Mix lysosome and apoptotic remains!

Our awkward solidity a wall of brambles no longer.

Tattooed Ladies

Janis Freegard

The Meeting of Ethel and Hauk

My grandmother, Ethel, was a tattooed lady, traveling round 1930s Europe with a circus. It was how she met Granddad Hauk, a Norwegian sailor in the German port of Bremen. He was in awe: roses twined around her shoulders, birds of all description peeped out from behind her decorous bathing suit, and when she lifted her long, onyx-black hair, ancient pyramids appeared down her back. These were Hauk's favourite. He returned to the circus night after night, applauding rapturously when Ethel walked on-stage. There were rumours that Ethel and her decorous bathing suit would part company for a small fee, but Hauk did not avail himself of this service.

The night the circus was due to leave town, he appeared outside her dressing room door with a dozen red roses and an engagement ring. This did not take Ethel by surprise. Madam Zola had seen it in her crystal ball the week before. "You'll meet a stranger," she'd declared.

"Tall, dark and handsome?" Ethel had asked, hopefully.

"Just strange," Madam Zola had replied.

"Ethel, I could look at you all day," Hauk told her, in the sing-song Scandinavian accent she would fall for. "You carry the whole world on your skin."

Granddad Hauk saw things in a different way from most people. He was quite convinced, for instance, that spacemen were about to in-

vade the Northern hemisphere. He planned to migrate south, with his sights set on Australia — surely sufficiently far away to be safe. “They’ll never bother coming all the way down there,” he explained, right before dropping to one knee and inviting Ethel to make a new life with him.

Australia sounded like a bit of an adventure and Ethel was always up for adventure. However, she waited until they’d slept together before accepting Hauk’s proposal. Her mother had warned her not to risk spending her life with a man who had no passion — ‘Try before you buy’. Ethel tried and was well pleased. Pleased enough to marry Hauk the following morning. She’d found that she received plenty of propositions as a professional tattooed lady, but not too many proposals. Hauk was not an especially handsome man, having a hooked nose and eyes that didn’t look quite parallel, but he had chosen Ethel and Ethel knew she would be adored her whole life. Madam Zola came along to throw confetti. Ethel thought having her there put a stamp of approval on the whole affair.

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Ethel and Hauk emigrate; a baby is born

The day they left Germany, Ethel pricked her thumb on a briar. I’m pregnant, she thought. *It’ll be a girl.*

They settled in Sydney. Hauk found work on the docks. No-one could have been more elated when baby Briar, my mother, was born. Hauk found her as perfect as his lovely wife.

If Ethel’s home decorating was a little eccentric, Hauk didn’t complain. Ethel liked to cut pictures of roses out of magazines and stick them on to the walls. When Hauk came home one day with a couple

of rolls of rose-patterned wallpaper, Ethel was delighted. She cut out all the wallpaper roses and stuck them up with the others.

‘You make the home as beautiful as you,’ said Hauk.

When my mother was old enough to occupy herself in a play-pen for an hour or two, Ethel found she could supplement Hauk’s income through an arrangement she came to with the landlord, Mr. Spiggs. Mr. Spiggs had friends who would come round to the house to watch Ethel disrobe. She was a circus performer after all: she enjoyed an audience. Hauk never questioned why they were living off steak even when he was out of work, nor did it occur to him to wonder how Ethel paid for her silk dresses and silver teapots. He assumed he was a good provider and that Ethel was careful with money. They both thought themselves lucky and Briar was doted on.

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Sadly for Hauk and Ethel — though not for Briar herself — my mother was an only child. Ethel had three miscarriages over the years and each time she was devastated.

Briar grows up

Around the age of thirteen, my mother started hearing voices. Ethel was delighted. “She’s got the second sight,” she told Hauk proudly. “She’ll be another Madam Zola.” Sometimes the voices told Briar to do something odd, like run down the street naked, but Ethel was unperturbed.

“There are angelic voices and impish voices,” she told Briar. “You’ll have to learn to filter the mischievous ones out.” Over time, my mother developed more control over her abilities, and the neighbours be-

gan seeking her advice. Often they'd bring her their new-borns to learn their destinies. Briar learned to weed out the positive information from the negative, declaring for example that a certain baby was likely to become a banker, but not mentioning to his proud parents that gambling debts would lead him one day to prison.

People were a little afraid of her, so Ethel was somewhat taken aback when Briar started showing signs of pregnancy. She refused to name the father, saying only that the baby was a gift from the Universe. Hauk had his suspicions that a spaceman was involved, and insisted that the family move further south. They packed up and left for New Zealand within the month.

"My baby will be artistic and will journey to foreign lands," Briar told Ethel, on the ship that would deliver them to Auckland.

"Perhaps you'll do some more journeying yourself," suggested Ethel.

"I think not," said Briar and she elected not to speak for the rest of the trip, preferring to stand on deck alone, gazing out to sea. But she hummed to me, as I grew inside her.

I am born

Hauk had a hankering for a rural home. Through the generosity of Mr. Spiggs and his friends, Ethel had put away enough for a deposit on a little house in the Wairarapa. That was the house I was born in. Sadly, Briar died giving birth to me. Hauk was all for building a pyramid in the back garden, to be her tomb. He thought her spaceman lover might turn up to claim her body and revive her. Ethel had her way, however, and Briar was buried in the local churchyard. Ethel planted

a white climbing rose on the grave and visited her daughter weekly. It was thus left to Ethel and Granddad Hauk to bring me up. I could not have asked for better grandparents.

I was born a hermaphrodite. Intersexed, as they say these days. The doctors offered surgery to make me look more like one gender or the other, but thankfully Ethel and Hauk wouldn't hear of it, so I was spared the years of painful surgery and lack of future options that so often accompany such circumstances. We were a family that celebrated individuality.

They named me Andy, short for androgyne. For social convenience, I was brought up as a girl. Aware that I looked a little different from other girls, I covered my body under a towel in the changing rooms and was thought somewhat coy, but no more so than the Brethren girls. I was considered a typical tomboy and played with the boys as often as with the girls. I was never lonely.

Hauk had discovered a talent for making furniture and his work was selling well in local shops. Ethel turned her hand to raising chickens and sold eggs. I would sometimes scrub her back for her when she took her bath and loved to trace the roses on her shoulders and the ancient pyramids down her back.

"Do you ever miss the circus?" I asked her once.

"Life's a circus," she replied. It seemed that as she grew older, Hauk was the only audience she needed.

At puberty I started to grow a little facial hair. Granddad Hauk lent me his razor and taught me how to shave. Confiding in me his suspicion of my father's origins, he bought an old telescope and we would

look up into the stars together wondering which planet was mine. Ethel took me aside one day and said it was more likely my father was an Italian boy she'd seen with my mother in a café in Sydney, but I wasn't to tell Hauk that.

I seek my fortune

I left school the day I turned fifteen. "Grandma, Granddad, I'm going to become a tattoo artist."

Ethel clapped her hands. "That's marvellous, Andy! How exciting!" Granddad Hauk, who had never been tattooed himself, immediately volunteered as a human canvas.

"I'll need to learn my trade first," I told him. I set off soon afterwards for Auckland, where I was sure there would be plenty of studios.

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After a quiet, rural childhood, I was glad to be in the hum of city life. I knocked on doors until I found a tattooist willing to take me on. In a new town with a fresh start, I thought it was time to explore the more masculine side of my nature. It was liberating dressing as a boy. I found I looked no more feminine than many other boys my age. My breasts have always been small and were easily concealed under loose-fitting shirts. I had been tallish for a girl and was now shortish for a boy, but not so short as to attract attention. I watched other boys carefully to adjust my walk and the way I moved my arms. I stopped shaving.

Jake, the tattooist was a kind, quiet man who had learned the trade in his years at sea. He asked me few questions, which suited me well. He was fastidious in keeping his tattooing equipment clean and had an

artistic eye and a careful hand. I learned by watching, and was sometimes required to spread the client's skin to provide Jake with a tauter canvas. Most of our customers were young men, who wanted a naked woman or a cartoon character on their upper arms. A few came in for a whole back or complete body tattoo. These were what fascinated me most, watching the vista unfold under Jake's steady hand.

I settled into a new home, boarding with a retired prostitute called Miranda who wore a great deal of make-up and drank a great deal of gin. She cooked for me every evening, unless she was already too drunk by the time I got home from work. On those occasions I'd fetch fish and chips from Tick-tock's takeaway bar and Miranda would turn up her record player as loud as it would go and dance around the room waving pieces of battered shark in time to the music.

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I have never been especially house-proud, but Miranda's house was filthy. "That's it!" I told her finally after I'd tripped over the pile of empty bottles and ancient newspapers in the kitchen once too often. "I'm cleaning up." Miranda grumbled for the rest of the week, but I knew she was grateful, really. Her eyesight was failing, but she refused to see an optician. She was almost seventy.

My first tattoo

Miranda and I were pleasant company for each other, for the most part. I was sometimes woken by her drunken singing in the middle of the night, and she would complain when I used up all the hot water scrubbing tattoo ink off myself in the shower, but mostly we cohabited amicably.

I spent my leisure time practising the skills I was learning from Jake,

sketching out designs on my own body with a fine fountain pen, learning to draw a sure, unbroken line. My first tattoo I etched into my own forearm: a briar rose, for the mother who hadn't lived to meet me. "You did good," Jake told me when he saw it and he let me loose on the customers. I started by colouring in the outlines he had drawn, then progressed to simple designs: anchors and birds.

When I thought myself proficient enough, I returned to the Wairarapa, ready to give Granddad Hauk his tattoo. He asked for a spaceship on his right shoulder. I managed a reasonable facsimile of the Starship Enterprise and Hauk grinned for the rest of the day. He declared that the spacemen were no longer so much of a threat and it was probably safe for me to travel to the northern hemisphere.

"You're artistic, just like your mother said. Next you must go on your long journey." He urged me to visit the pyramids I'd always admired so much on Ethel's back. Ethel sighed and said she'd always longed to visit Egypt.

"We'll go there together some day," I told her. "You, me and Granddad Hauk."

"It was the spacemen who built the pyramids," said Hauk. He seemed to have made his peace with them.

Ethel told me how handsome I was looking now I'd grown a moustache. "I'm pleased to see you go," she told me. "As pleased as I was to see you arrive. Not because we don't enjoy you being here, but because it makes us happy to know you're out in the world doing something you love."

My life changes

I worked for Jake for two years before I decided to branch out on my own. With his blessing and some of his old equipment, I opened a small studio in a back street. It took a while for business to build.

Miranda was very generous. "You can have a rent holiday, dear. Just for a few months until you find your feet. Reckon I can send a bit of business your way too. Some of the younger working girls." Mostly they wanted birds and butterflies. Occasionally someone would ask for a rose like the briar rose on my arm. I always refused, explaining it was in memory of my mother.

I returned to Ethel and Granddad Hauk every few months. Each time, as I left, Hauk would wink at me and say, "Don't forget the pyramids." I assured him I wouldn't. The business was starting to make money and I managed to save a little, whenever I could. I drew pictures of the pyramids, from my memory of those on Ethel's back and hung them over my bed.

After one of my visits to Ethel and Hauk, everything changed. I arrived home in Auckland early in the morning to find a young woman in my bed. She had short, blonde hair, an upturned nose and smiling, blue eyes. I don't know which of us was more startled.

"I'm Miranda's niece," she told me, pulling up the duvet with one hand and extending the other to shake mine. "Rosie. I'm over from London."

"Miranda didn't tell me you were coming."

"I wanted it to be a surprise."

She was staying for a few weeks. I offered her my room, but she in-

sisted on moving to the couch in the lounge. When she found out what I did for a living, she begged me to tattoo her. We stayed up late at night drinking Milo laced with rum while I drew up the designs she wanted. It was an ambitious project. Her plan was to have the Norse pantheon across her back: thunder-god Thor with his magic hammer Mjöllnir, the lovely Freya, in her chariot drawn by cats, Odin the All-father with his one eye and blue cloak. Granddad Hauk had told me the stories many times.

Some days later, when the drawings were completed to our mutual satisfaction, we went out to celebrate. I took her for dinner to an intimate French restaurant I'd always wanted to try but had never had anyone to bring to. We ate French onion soup, snails and duck á l'orange and drank a bottle of good French wine. Looking into my eyes, Rosie said, "You're not like other men."

"No," I said, "I'm not." And I told her.

Rosie moved into my room with me and I soon knew that she loved me as much as Granddad Hauk loved Ethel. Miranda couldn't have been happier for us. During the days, Rosie came to my studio and we worked on the Norse gods and goddesses. I drew Freya, who is after all the goddess of love, to resemble Rosie herself, and I drew the trickster god Loki, who can take both male and female form, to look like me. When the time came for Rosie to return to London, I asked her to stay. She agreed and enrolled in a travel agent's course. "I'll be able to get discount fares," she said, eyes fixed on the pyramids above our bed.

With Rosie's tattoo complete, I surprised myself by offering her another: a briar rose, identical to my own. She accepted with tears in her eyes and I knew she was mine for life.

Tragedy strikes

Nothing stays the same forever, however much we might wish it would. “I’m dying,” Miranda announced one day, after half a bottle of gin. “Quack says three to six months.”

Rosie and I were shaken to the core. Miranda’d become as much like family to me as Ethel and Hauk. I found it hard to imagine life without her. Her doctor estimated only another three to six months.

In true Miranda style, she decided to throw her own funeral. (‘Why should you buggers have all the fun after I’m dead?’) It was a colourful party, well attended by Miranda’s former clients and colleagues. The gin flowed late into the night as we sang along with her to her favourite songs. As the last guest rolled out of the house at five o’clock in the morning, Miranda summoned Rosie and me over to the couch where she’d half-collapsed.

“I’m leaving you the house,” she declared. “And start packing your bags — we’re going on holiday. Get me some of those discount fares, Rosie, I haven’t got long. And you —” stabbing her finger at me, “you’re bringing Hauk and Ethel. It’s about time I met them.”

“Sly old fox,” said Rosie, wiping her eyes.

Another journey is taken

A short week later and against the advice of Miranda’s doctor, the five of us made the long journey to Egypt. I didn’t know it then, but only four of us would make it home. Miranda knew. Afterwards, we found a stash of blood-stained hankies in her handbag.

She was pale at the airport when we arrived, the smear of rouge across her cheeks failing to convey an impression of health. “Don’t give me that look,” she snapped. “The funeral’s already been.”

Somehow we made it through the rattly coach ride to the pyramids of Giza, Miranda included. My memory of that day is one of the happiest of my life, spent in the company of the four people I loved most in the world. I stood a long time in front of the royal necropolis, Rosie’s hand in mine. Five thousand years of history, two million blocks of limestone. It seemed to reach the heavens. Our awed silence was broken only by Granddad Hauk. “They’ve got nothing on yours Ethel. I’ll take yours any day.”

I undergo another change

Even the house seemed to miss Miranda. I couldn’t face work in those first few weeks. Rosie would come home each night to find me sitting in the dark, listening to Miranda’s old records.

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It was more than grief, though; there was something else. Apart from the loss of my dear friend, I should have been happier than ever. I had everything I could have wanted: a job I enjoyed, a woman I loved, a home that felt like a home should feel, people who loved me. Why then, was there an underlying dissatisfaction to my life? Was it just some kind of existential ennui? Was I expecting too much?

It was Miranda who figured it out for me. I decided it was time to sort through some of her things, while Rosie was out one night. I brought down two ancient suitcases from the top of her wardrobe and forced open the rusty locks.

A wealth of colours, textures and Miranda's memories cascaded out. Some of her favourite pieces of clothing and jewellery were in those cases. I could almost feel her at my side, exclaiming in pleasure at each rediscovery, "My Oroton earrings! My white feather boa! Oh! My taf-feta dress. I loved this dress." I held it out in front of me. It was stunning indeed, midnight blue with a square neckline and figure-hugging skirt. I could see why it had been a favourite.

I could imagine a sly look creeping across Miranda's face. "Go on. It would fit you perfectly."

"Oh, I couldn't," I said out loud. "I mean, it's not really me." But when I touched the lush fabric, I was no longer sure. Would it be right to deny the request of a dead woman? "Go on then," I said, picturing Miranda's impish grin.

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When I smoothed the dress over my hips, I felt a completeness I hadn't felt for some time. If Miranda had been there, she would have clapped her hands and said, "It's you, you look gorgeous, you must have it."

I was still wearing it, along with the Oroton earrings and feather boa, when Rosie came home. "Well now, who have we here?" she asked. She seemed a little surprised, but so was I when she flung her arms around me and covered me with kisses. "I'm so proud of you, my love," she was saying and I could see she was; it was shining out of her. "So proud."

What the Girls Do

Sarah McBee

We bring you back
to our painted rooms,
and our Denim Dreams nail polish,
open cans of macadamia nuts,
pour Jack over ice into jelly jars.
Sometimes we unzip \$100 jeans
or twelve-inch mini-skirts.
And sometimes we play
Stevie Wonder, then turn it off
and put our clothes back on.
We walk you out the next day,
forced to roll our own joints
and cook our own breakfast.
We water the plants
in a fit of productivity,
sort our magazines into like piles,
move scraps of paper
from bureau to coffee table.
But when the light through our blinds
goes from gray to yellow to gray—
we will pull on boots,
lock our doors,
and hear the wind sing through
our dangly earrings.

When You Talk About Your Feelings

Sarah McBee

Say it better with a smirk,
at arm's length, when the lights go down.
Tangled hair across your face,
you don't need to smoke. You're tough.

Maybe blame it on childhood—
Dad's proud grin at your held-back tears?
Steel against mean-spirited monkey bars innuendo?
Well, smell this marker:

There's a way to squeeze depression
through the length of your intestines
and pull a raging laugh out of your ass...
Just think for a minute about how your ass *looks*.

Then imagine you're 50
and fondly reminiscing.
Yes, by some fluke—lack of
apocalypse? marriage to money?—

you've made middle age.
From your saggy graying perch,
say it straight to your younger face:
That boy won't last the time it takes

your beard burn to heal. And if
you say love out loud,
it might just be gone.
So feel better with a smidge of Neosporin.

Call an ex-lover who's patient enough
to eat through the crust
to the mythic pudding center.
Even better, scrape out the pudding yourself

and store it in plastic-wrapped cups
in the refrigerator.
If a friend drops in, you can open
one from the back and serve it chilled.

Big minus Tom Hanks

Eugenio Volpe

I'd stand shirtless in front of the toy box waiting for her to pick me up. She drove a pink convertible Vette. Always the consummate woman, she'd scoot over and let me drive. I didn't have a car, which was embarrassing, but Barbie never said boo about it. She was sweet like that. She was moral enough to resent the privileges bestowed upon her. Without ever knowing the tapeworm creepy-crawl of a want, she had come into existence already having everything—a Malibu beach house, a townhouse, and three hundred and sixty-five different outfits. In comparison, I had pretty much nothing. Life sucks and then you're born. Thus spoke Mattel.

50

Barbie wasn't the upbeat bimbo that everyone thought. She was insanely cynical and Maoist. She was born in Hong Kong, the rapeful product of an almighty corporate goddess and Chinese peasant. Shipped off to America by her mother, Barbie vowed to avenge her father's squalor by deconstructing her all-American bloneness. She would succeed by slutting around with pre-pubescent American boys. She was Che Guevara with a standup pair of C's. She'd lift her leg over the stick shift and stomp on the gas as I spun bodacious figure eights across the carpet. With her face buried in my crotch, I would launch the pink Vette off album cover ramps à la Bo and Luke Duke, The Police wailing Jungian synchronicities off the knotty pine boundaries of our universe.

After a few hours of stunt-driving pornography, we'd head back to her townhouse and make crazy love in the yellow elevator. I could barely

keep up. She was twice as tall as my penis. She was too much woman for me physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Perhaps for the best, our affair ended when my mother walked into my older sister's bedroom to find me lying shirtless in front of the townhouse listening to "King of Pain" with my eyes closed, Barbie shoved headfirst down the front of my pants. Sting came to a scratching halt. I opened my eyes and sat up just in time to see my mother's open-handed right hook catch me upside the head. She ripped Barbie from my pants and hit me over the head with her.

"What kind of a nine year-old boy are you?" she cried.

"I don't have any toys of my own!"

"You have plenty of balls," she quipped. "Go outside and play with them. Little boys shouldn't play with dolls."

"I'm a lover, not an athlete. My only way out of Castle Green is to seduce an heiress. I have to practice."

My mom stormed out of the bedroom in tears. Castle Green was a low-income apartment complex. We lived there my entire life. My mother worked at Burger King. My father left her for a man when I was two. He never came back. Every few years, he'd send a birthday card with fifty bucks in it.

Coincidentally, a birthday card arrived a month later. I used the money to buy Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Darth Vader, and Boba Fett. Princess Leia was a better fit. She was a princess who dressed like a monk. She had an absentee father. I had an absentee father. We didn't need cynicism. We didn't need a convertible Vette to get around. She was small enough to fit down the front of my pants without my mom

noticing. She was roughly the same size as my penis. She came with me everywhere. She jacked my ego with the powers of the force. She was Mr. Miyagi with a perky set of B cups, the muse of James Blunt and Paul Simon, the daughter of Eddie and Debbie, the consummate woman.

*from An Introduction to Venantius Fortunatus
for Schoolchildren or Understanding the Medi-
eval Concept World through Metonymy: a Begin-
ner's Book.*

Mike Czagny

Unit 1, Chapter 5.

*Poem I.V of Fortunatus. Inscription for a shrine marking the site
where St. Martin cut his own cloak in two to clothe a beggar.*

Hurrying pilgrim, stop here!
Stop here. When you think
hurrying pilgrim, think
stop here! When you think
Sarah Jessica Parker, you think
Carrie Bradshaw. Stop here
pilgrim, there is a lot more to her than
Sarah Jessica Parker, you think
the place teaches the prayerful
to tread lightly. Carrie Bradshaw, stop here
when you think Sarah Jessica Parker
the exile of earth, you think
the glamorous 41-year-old has been linked
with the exile of earth and heaven's,
there is a lot more to her than *Sex and the*
place teaches the prayerful the exile

of earth, St. Martin, when you think
you think Sarah Jessica Parker,
the 41-year-old has been linked
with St. Martin. St. Martin you think
shut himself in a cell here and
unveiled the axis of heaven.

The glamorous 41-year-old
has been linked with the heavens and opened
the heavens over the years including the
heavens and John Kennedy Jr., but it's
her marriage to the heavens, to "Ferris Bueller"
under this temple's roof that has
unveiled the axis of heaven. He seized
the mysteries, St. Martin, a mighty anchorite
amid the city's bustle unveiled
"Ferris Bueller," himself a mighty
anchorite, to "Ferris Bueller" himself
that has many women wanting to
be a mighty anchorite. SJP is not only
"Ferris Bueller" himself, a mighty
most admired actress in Hollywood but
is also an admired human being involved in
the mysteries, St. Martin. Here Martin
stripped himself and clothed
he seized the mysteries. There is no way
the most admired actress in Hollywood
a multi-award winning mother of
the exile of earth stripped himself,
covered the freezing stranger. He burned

with faith, covered the freezing stranger and
he burned with faith. He stripped himself and

he burned. I would say that anyone
who thinks they can really change
another person is slightly misguided.
Even the bishop would say that
they can really change another, even
the bishop, that honored man who thinks
I have so many female friends. I would say
that anyone who thinks
they can date men with warning signs
and Martin, the bishop, that honored man
I would say is slightly misguided. I have
so many female friends who date men with
warning signs all over them and Martin
when he went to say that Mass
wears beggar's clothes. I have so many female
beggar's clothes I would say
that honored man and Martin gave
a blessed sign when he crossed the chalice.
And they really feel they are uniquely
the bishop, that honored man, and they really
feel they are uniquely gifted
beggar's clothes. And Martin when
he went to say that Mass at altar
uniquely gifted in some way
so many female friends,
a blessed sign: From the sacred head
of the man a flame, a globe

of benign fire surged up to the stars,
he was uninjured and gems
covered his naked flesh. His naked flesh
clothed the beggar, his naked flesh
burned with faith, his naked flesh
unveiled the axis of heaven, his naked flesh

I would say is slightly misguided, I would say
anyone that thinks they can really change
is slightly misguided. And they really
think they are going to be the person
who finally fixes whatever flaw
they have. I find men far more complicated than
the refulgence of precious stones
shone from his arms, far more complicated
than the bishop, that honored
precious stones, whatever flaw they have
so many female friends.

I find men far more complicated than
slightly misguided, I have so many
warning signs I would say, I have so many
precious stones, far more complicated than
St. Martin, and you in heaven, Martin
Intercessor carry God my halting
far more precious than complicated
words for me. I find men far more
complicated than that of course.

Assignment for Chapter 5.

It takes a very special woman to become a surrogate mother. She has to go into this knowing from the beginning that she will give birth to a child and then turn that child over to its parents. You have to have a certain mentality that very few women have, a vision of sexuality that will help you be proactive in shaping the sexuality of the next generation, enabling you to finally launch a counteroffensive to the sexual revolution of the past century. Prepare a three-to-five-minute oral presentation that addresses the following questions. You can refer to index cards when delivering your presentation, but you cannot read it aloud!

1. *Analogia entis* is the idea that any likeness between God and the creature discloses a still greater unlikeness. **Compare and contrast.**
2. The other day we were in my FWB's kitchen and he got this real serious look and said, "I need to tell you something." Then he just said, "Forget it." Then we got into this huge argument about who should cook the quesadillas. Why do I feel sad about this?
3. Read picture books by an author/illustrator and make inferences about the author based on their works?
4. Describe the emotional life of Venantius Fortunatus based on what you know about him right now. We will repeat this exercise at the end of Unit 2.

A Dotted Line

Henry Vauban

The forest is tangled with ribbons of all colors, unraveled just off hiking paths. They lead to wilting bodies hanging from sturdy branches like overripe fruit. Imagine a ribbon hiker stopping to carve her lover's name in tree bark, writing the words which will be her last, drenched in fate to decompose with the leaves, baby blue ribbon following her to the place where she will officially give up. We call them notes for the Gods and wonder what could have been so bad as we collect corpses and detritus. We cut them down with tree pruners and they collapse in piles to be driven out in wheelbarrows at the end of our shift.

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The loved ones lean on rear bumpers smoking cigarettes, swilling bottom shelf whiskey out of hipflasks, waiting for confirmation like love-lorn tailgaters for a team that has never won. Except when there aren't any loved ones. Today she is rotting bones in our wheelbarrow for no one. Today she will go in a trash bag marked with the date and we will go home to the things and people that divide our attentions. She will just be in that bag. We keep cigarettes and whiskey in our cars for such occasions. We stand in for the loved ones missing, the loved ones who never were. We stand in for communal feeling, trying our best to close the circle left open for desperate souls to escape, with a dotted line.

Rove-vore

Colby Somerville

The clouds are above and the clouds are below
A-vore, my love, a-vore, my love
my vote is my voice, and I would vore
for a stone, token of enduring love

The clouds, like, completely are a-fore so like many ex-
voters I would, um, choose a-roving de-fore duration.

Want me to sign there on your range rove?
Um, want me tonight my succubus vore, at the
The Vore Buffalo Jump, as ye rove out
on a moonlit night, form of Turkey Man: people
in a lot of countries would actually
vore for us to occupy on them.

59

Then it all started
gobble gobble them alt trash,
to go bad. My brothers
in bathroom mirrors, transistors
and sisters and I were
rewired, turned-on dwarf kings
all looking forward to Christmas.
some strip.

Roll in the gutter with Rove while Rome
burns, my love, power biting, belly punching
and navel love. How sweet's the evenen
dusk to rove. Love for the Monarch I feel.

Untitled

Colby Somerville

ich-I

a levedy wot,

hir white neke

like

an harvest-gos

neke,

whose antique broaching
the subject catches tracklights,

thrown under gallery space

a space white as wayle bon.

Untitled

Colby Somerville

the was there a blast / reiterrearanger / cowboying West of
LCD / you lasso Don't you let these boys waste their lives on
HALO II, as a pre-boy / animates / a renaissance perspective / onto
Khost / extrajudicial, January / summary ice cream / or arbitrarily
Baitullah Mehsud / a leader lassoglossolalia-ed / on a movie / rope
us good / people again as previously / blasting to nix

the was there a blast / reiterrearanger / cowboying West of
LCD / -ing, -sively asking / in a light suggestive of / an Eastern
vengeance / dear crosshairs shed / from the social code / in
vengeance / by your Lockheed-Martin trick rope / midwived in
Khost Province, where they keep / replode / over and over for
us good / people again as previously / blasting to nix

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the was there a blast / reiterrearanger / cowboying West of
LCD / -ing, -sively asking / in a light suggestive of / an Eastern
LCD / you lasso Don't you let these boys waste their lives on
vengeance / dear crosshairs shed / from the social code / in
HALO II, as a pre-boy / animates / a renaissance perspective / onto
vengeance / by your Lockheed-Martin trick rope / midwived in
Khost / extrajudicial, January / summary ice cream / or arbitrarily
Khost Province, where they keep / replode / over and over for
Baitullah Mehsud / a leader lassoglossolalia-ed / on a movie / rope
us good / people again as previously / blasting to nix

Winner

William John Bert

“It’s cool,” I said, offering a twenty for the round. Primo’s hands flashed out and yanked my nipples—a double titty twister. I cursed and dropped the bill.

“You’ll still be feeling that when you get to wherever the fuck,” he said.

“El Paso,” I said, rubbing under my shirt, where the skin was already itchy and raw from wearing long johns under two sweaters.

“El Peno,” he said. “That’s Spanish for ‘the penis.’”

The bartender—let me just say I love bartender’s butts, how smooth they get from all the eyes that follow them night after night as their mistresses reach for bottles on the shelf—placed two glasses in front of us. I was doing OK. National 40 Day does that to people. And after your forty ounces of malt liquor run out, going to a bar makes things even more OK. Just me and Primo in a bar on a Monday night with a beautiful bartender pouring us drinks.

“One for me and I’ll get the round,” said the only other person in the place, a guy at the end of the bar. When random companionless male dive bar patrons buy you a drink, it’s a recipe for—even more than getting cruised—being ranted at. Once a man claiming to be the ex-bassist of a downtown punk band I’d heard of but never heard buttonholed me for forty-five minutes to curse another obscurely famous musician for stealing his ideas. That was by far the best buttonholer I’ve encountered—talk about damning with faint praise. The only way out, like many sticky situations, was to fake interest at first, then slow-

ly tune him out until he went away.

But tonight—tonight, gracious was the word I wanted. The snow had finally stopped falling, and even the low grey sky puking the city's light pollution back at her couldn't touch my inner Texan. No one perhaps has ever been happier to move to El Paso. It didn't matter that it was El Paso, really. What mattered was I was moving.

"Thanks for the generous offer," I said. "But that's OK." Primo stared straight ahead. He was a stout knight, thick-chested and solicitous to even recent acquaintances, but with a stubborn fighting streak, as if avenging for some buried sin. He'd been a couple years ahead of me at school, a captain of the rugby team when I joined as a freshman. He was always up for drinking, having a good time. I wasn't big or strong enough to get much play when the team traveled, but every Wednesday we'd scrimmage on the quad lawn at midnight. Primo was always there with a tall drink, kidding around, siding with whichever team needed bodies, tackling and talking shit. I quit halfway through my second year, but I stayed friends with Primo. One year we even lived together. Then he graduated and took a job in some midtown finance firm.

63

"Why not?" said the guy.

"Yeah," said Primo. "Why not?" He hated the job in the finance firm.

"OK," I said. "Why not?" What was I going to say—because you'll rant at us?

Primo smiled, maybe for the first time tonight. He was pissed because of the blizzard. National 40 Day is February 9th, the fortieth day of the year. We invented it in college, when your two dollars got you a

tall bottle of manly girth brimming with liquid that left you dazed and giggling. Truth be told, I'd forgotten about it. There was a period of several months when I didn't see much of Primo, or anyone else, really. I'd been busy with grad school applications, that's what I told everyone, and it was true—I didn't even drink, except a few beers each night—but it was also not true. My busy-ness was an immersion of my own making. It helped me get into grad school, sure, but at the time I stopped hanging out, I hadn't really been thinking about grad school. I just needed a break. A change.

In January an email appeared in my inbox. *National 40 Day is for real this year*, wrote Primo. *Major plans in the works*. OK, I thought, my apps are in the mail, I'm done here—why not? Then the snow fell. I like snow, but this kind, the moment it hit the pavement, it turned. And not a little snow, but enough to suffocate a city that gets all puffed up about how go-go-go it is. Another reason to look forward to El Paso.

#

The bar was named The Library, and it delivered on that. Across long shelves dusty books tipped into each other like drunks, and if you could make out one of the titles, some forgotten volume no one'd ever heard of, it just made you sad that people wrote. Everywhere good had closed early.

"You students?" this guy asked.

"No," I said.

"You work?"

"Yeah," I said.

"I used to work," he said. "Two days ago I worked."

He was sitting on the stool next to the wall. A beaten speaker chugged punk rock from a shelf above his head. The shelf rattled to the beat. He leaned back, and the lapel of his jacket—he was wearing a suit—bunched up. The suit, dirty and wrinkled and spotted with snowmelt, seemed less out of place than if it had been clean, but still.

The guy smiled and looked right at me, then at Primo, then me. I sipped whiskey and waited for some ranting.

He said, "I won the lottery."

"Cool," I said.

"Congratulations," said Primo.

I raised my glass, and Primo did the same. The guy watched us, then raised his too.

"I wouldn't believe me either," he said. "But I'm putting it out there anyway. I couldn't care less."

I almost said, Neither could I, but I didn't. We were just two guys doing OK on a Monday night. We didn't even have to get up in the morning—the blizzard.

He went on, how he bought the ticket in Florida, his buddy's bachelor party in Miami. "A bunch of us bought them. Mine matched nine of eleven." He sipped from his beer, slowly. "You don't have to believe me."

"Who said they don't believe you?" I asked.

"I believe you," said Primo.

"I'm flying to Tallahassee first thing in the morning once the runways are clear. But there's no way," he said, lighting a cigarette, "no way I'm sleeping tonight. More, more, more," he said to the bartender, pointing at each of us and himself in turn. "I'll just buy drinks until everybody's happy as I am."

"I'm happy," I said.

"Then we," he said, "are in agreement."

What a great line he'd hit on. I couldn't see how he stood to gain anything, but then, the people who start chain emails don't gain anything either—except maybe the warped satisfaction of planting thoughts in people's minds, burrowing in and leaving something behind, unbound by facts and truth and reality.

"You could show us the ticket," I said, trying to puzzle it out. "But we don't know the winning numbers."

He nodded. "But as long as I'm buying rounds, why wonder? Why not just believe?"

"Look, man, I believe you," said Primo.

"Me too," I said.

Winner signaled for another round.

"You know this guy?" I asked the bartender.

"Nope," she said. We watched her disappear into the storage room behind the bar.

"If you believed me, you'd ask," Winner said. "You want to ask," he said, "you can ask. It's cool."

"Ask what," I said.

"Four-point-seven," he said. "Four-point-seven."

He drained his beer, stood, and did a little dance over to the jukebox.

#

Primo was glaring into his drink. Somehow, for National 40 Day, he'd arranged a big party at a bar on 14th Street, to be sponsored by Colt 45. A couple hot bands would play. A photographer was coming, and some reporters. First the photographer canceled. Then the bar called and said they weren't opening, not that anyone would have showed anyway. Even the subway was operating intermittently. He called me, seriously bummed, to say don't bother coming, and I figured what the hell, I'm leaving in a few days anyway. I threw on boots and trudged ten blocks to his apartment, first stopping at the only open bodega I could find. They dropped the two forties in individual paper bags, which they put inside another bag, one of those nasty black plastic ones bodegas put everything in, and as I walked the blanketed streets the clanking of the bottles was the only sound in the world, that and the stoplights ticking when I got near a corner.

Now the night had soured again. There was a time when I could find consolation for anything by saying to myself, *He sat drinking whiskey in a bar at Avenue A and East 2nd Street*, or wherever I was. The simple thread of my existence in New York mended any rips in my opinion of myself. The street signs at every corner might as well have said Important Place, East Hot Shit Street, You Count Avenue.

That didn't work anymore.

Some thumping hard-rock eighties song came on, the kind people always feel the need to head bang to.

"That guy's pissing me off," said Primo.

"At least he's not ranting," I said.

"He's really pissing me off," said Primo.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm getting pissed, too."

"You're getting pissed," Primo said. "I've never seen you angry in my life."

That made me a little mad, even though it was true—how much sense does this make? It made me a little mad to hear I never get mad. Not that I cared that much.

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Winner slid back onto his stool and smacked his palm against the bar to the beat. "Rich dude," I said. "Spare me one lonely cigarette."

He slid me the pack. "Gentlemen," he said. "What are you going to do with your lives?"

I saw us chasing him out into the slush, him skidding around a corner, taking a spill. I'd be the lookout since I had at least a head on Primo, while he'd throw a punch and grab the ticket, torn and wet, from the man's pocket, and then we'd run to the avenue and jump in a miraculous cab. Neither of us would speak, both breathing hard, fogging the already damp leather even more. We'd rush home to his place or mine and celebrate with yet more beers, after looking up the winning numbers and learning whether truth lived or died, either way gaining for ourselves a new good story or a new unbelievable story.

Primo said, "I'm going to lie to strangers in bars."

Winner took back his pack of cigarettes. He lit one. "I'm going to help people," he said. "I just want everyone to be happy as I am."

"Give them money," said Primo. "That's how you make people happy." He pounded his drink. "That or lovin'."

#

The headbanging song had finished. Punk rock was back on. No one was saying anything. Even Winner was just humming quietly to himself. I finished my cigarette, the one he'd given me, and my drink, the one he'd bought me.

"I'm going to grad school," I said.

"Grad school," Winner said. "Fair enough. I thought of that myself. You need any help?"

69

"I got it covered," I said.

"Fair enough," said Winner. "And you, my man?"

Primo said, "There must be another place open."

#

"Who says I'm doing anything?" said Primo. I'd lost track of how many drinks the bartender had emerged just long enough to serve us. "I'm living," said Primo. "That's what I'm doing."

#

The speaker was still thumping on its shelf and I was kind of wonder-

ing at what point the nails would shake loose and bring the whole thing down when Primo spoke once more. "Today is National 40 Day," he said.

Winner looked up. "What?"

"Today is National 40 Day."

"Forty like the drink? You just make that up?"

"Yeah I made it up," said Primo. "Me." He belched.

"I'll bite," said Winner, lighting another cigarette. "Tell me about National 40 Day."

I thought Primo would just laugh and tell him to fuck off, but he didn't. He started talking about the plans, the party, the concert, the giveaways. "People are interested," he said. "Colt 45 is interested. Anheuser-Busch is interested. The Village Voice is interested."

"Sounds like a great holiday, friend."

"Forties are it. Forties are the new flavored vodka."

"OK," Winner said. He scratched at his nose. "I like a forty as much as the next man, but they aren't the new anything."

"I think I saw a place open on Seventh," I said.

"You're fucking with me," said Winner sadly. "I'm just out to spread the happiness, friend. And you're fucking with me."

"You hear this?" said Primo. "I'm fucking with him."

"National 40 Day?" said Winner. "I mean—really?"

“It’s new.”

“The lights were on, and I thought I saw someone in the back,” I said.

“Where is that bartender?” said Winner.

Primo said, “The Voice interviewed me. Would they interview me if it wasn’t real?”

“The Voice interviewed you,” said Winner.

“That’s called proof.” Primo was staring straight ahead. “You know the concept of proof.”

Winner drained his drink. “I’m going to find that bartender,” he said. “Then let’s read your interview.”

Primo took a long pull on his beer. A little dribbled down and his chin glistened. He wiped it with his sleeve, and I thought of something I didn’t think about often. A couple years ago, right before I graduated, I went to a birthday party for a rich kid I knew (really, it was his boyfriend I knew—he was a partier, he got drugs for us). This rich kid had rented a suite at the W hotel (he wouldn’t even have known what the W was if not for his boyfriend). I arrived late and staggered down the twelfth floor hallway and threw open the door. Out of the crowd—people I recognized and people I didn’t, sluts, stoners, even squares, a testament to the boyfriend’s power at partying—Primo came toward me, and when he reached me he pulled my face to his and laid one right on my lips. That surprised me, you can be sure—but the thing is, I didn’t even think about it. I just played it like this: took it in stride, no big thing, kept moving into the suite, grabbed a beer, saw the coke lined out on glass tables in each room and the TVs throughout tuned

to the in-house porn channel. If anything, to be honest, I felt proud. I'd kissed, or at least been kissed, by a man. I lived in New York, had been around the block, knew what was what, yeah.

The rest of the night unfolded like you'd think, one rushed parched competitive conversation after another. Later, much later, Primo and I were in the hallway again. His eyes were red and he held a nearly-empty beer bottle in his hand, dripping onto the floor. I probably looked the same.

"Cab it," he said. "Ride together."

"You live downtown, dude," I said.

"Dude," he said. He was staring at me. "Come on." He punched my arm, not hard, and he kept his fist on it and pushed me toward the door.

"It's way out of the way," I said, stepping aside. I remember wondering where everyone else was.

He blinked. He started to shake his head. "Yeah," he said. "It's stupid." He lurched down the hallway like we were rolling on high seas, still shaking his head. "Stupid! Stupid!"

All this flashed through my mind as we sat there at the bar, and Primo spoke, slowly, as if we had all the time in the world: he didn't have a copy of the Voice. The issue never hit the streets. The blizzard had delayed it. This was what he told me.

"Hey," he said. "Tell him you saw it." His eyes, brown, shallow, touched mine for a moment, then flicked away. "Tell him, OK?"

That night in the fresh, cool air outside the hotel, I saw Primo across the street, staring dumbly in my direction. Very slowly, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve. I drew myself up and saluted. I couldn't tell if he really saw me or not. Hell, I was so fucked up at that point I wasn't even sure it was him. I remember feeling like I should have paid for his cab. I felt like the least I could do was offer.

#

Winner reappeared, the bartender herding him like a bird scaring a chipmunk from its nest. "Darling," he said. "You've got paying customers."

"Last call's coming up verrry soon," she said.

"I admire you for staying open to the end."

"That means a lot," she said.

73

A big, bearded guy in a parka and boots came in just then, stomping snow. He put his arm around the bartender. This bar was just full of other people with prizes. "Last call," the bartender said. They walked together into the storage room. Primo slid off his stool and headed for the john.

"Friend," said Winner. "I won't see you again. But I wish you well." He was swaying. He offered his hand, and I shook it.

In the mirror I noticed a cab idling at the corner. "Look," I said. "There's your cab. First one all night. Take that to the airport and get your ass to Florida."

"I wish your friend well, too," he said. "But I wish you well."

"Same to you," I said. "Don't spend it all at once."

And you know what? I did wish him well. I wanted him to have won that lottery. It wasn't like there was less cool shit in the world for me if some random guy became rich all of a sudden.

"Get that cab, man," I said.

"One more round," he called to the bartender in the back room. I saw the bill he laid on the counter. One hundred dollars. The light changed and the cab drove away. "One more round. On me."

"We gotta get out of here," said Primo, back from the bathroom. "Before I suffocate in bullshit."

Winner smiled. "What's money, when one has fame? Read to me, friend," he said. "Read me your interview."

Primo snorted. "It's not like I carry it around with me," he said.

"No," said Winner. "Of course not."

"But I saw it," I said, lifting my glass to my mouth. "I saw it before." The words sounded strange, echoing off the glass. Only a wash of liquor was left.

Winner watched me put down my empty glass. He ashed into it. "Well then," he said. "Well then."

#

"Won't be like this in El Paso," said Primo. Outside the city felt deserted and, with the sidewalks fenced in by drifts and a plow rumbling a few blocks away, it seemed like we were trapped in a labyrinth. Ev-

everything was off-yellow, like the entire world had been peed on.

“Four-point-seven million,” I said. “That’s not even that much. I mean, you could buy a pretty nice house with that, and a bunch of other stuff. But realistically?”

“I’m hungry,” Primo said. “That kebab place is around here.”

“I’m not really feeling a kebab,” I said. “They won’t be open, anyway.” He started down the block. I slipped on some ice when I followed. In the cold my nipples had started to ache again. They were scraping against my long underwear. “It isn’t private jet money, anyway.”

“Would you shut the fuck up?” he said. “That guy was full of shit. *Full of shit*. Like moving-to-El Paso full of shit. What the fuck.” He looked back at me. “What’s the point? You never get mad. Do you ever feel anything?”

75

I thought, *He pulled his hat tight and headed down 1st Avenue, knowing he would soon be far across the country.*

A white van rumbled through the slop and shuddered to a stop at the corner. The driver got out and threw open the back doors, pulled out a stack of papers, and tossed them into a red vending box that said *The Village Voice*.

“Thanks, buddy!” called Primo. “Neither rain nor snow, right?” The paper guy gave us the finger and drove off. Primo pulled open the vending box and grabbed a paper. He stumbled over to The Library. The door was locked. He thrust the paper against the window. “You can’t *buy* publicity like this!” he shouted. “Cocksucker!” He pounded his fist on the glass. One time in college he went to a party that I didn’t

go to and came home speechless drunk. He slammed his head into the wall over and over again. I didn't stop him. He did it right in front of me, watching TV in the common room, and I let him. It seemed like he was taking care of something he needed to do. Eventually he went into his room. When I walked by on my way to bed, I saw him passed out, spread across his mattress. He'd left his door open.

Primo kept pounding on the window. The whole plate of glass shook. Slush fell from the sill. I could see Winner popping out of the bar, and Primo taking a swing at him, and them going down, rolling in the muck, arms and legs entwined, one on top and then the other, until they were both spent.

But the door stayed shut. After pounding on the window for several minutes, Primo stopped. He tried to rip the paper apart but it was too thick and he just got shreds of the first and last pages. He threw it at a trashcan. The wind caught it and whipped it along the street. He saw me watching. "The lottery," he said. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Forget him," I said.

"I saw it," he said, mushing the words. "I saw it, big rich man. I saw it." He stomped across the street. Halfway to the other side he tripped and went down. When he rose, his hat had ridden up, the material bunching loosely, some matted strands of hair hanging over his wet forehead. I'd known this guy the entire time I lived in New York. We'd hung out, played rugby, gotten drunk, gotten high, gone to Mets games, explored City Island, Red Hook, Arthur Avenue, once even the dank tunnels under campus. His rugby nickname was Buffalo. He'd taken it after he heard some guys calling him that—except they'd been calling him buffoon. I know. I was one of them. I was doing OK

on a weeknight with buffoon.

In the middle of the street. In New York City. Nowhere else.

Primo stared at his hand. The raw purple skin was smeared with blood and frozen gray grime. “It’ll be OK,” I said. A few scraps of the paper had landed nearby, soaked and darkened until they were indistinguishable from the slush. I took his hand. I brought it up to my mouth, and I gave it a kiss where it was bleeding.

Maybe Narcissus

Ashley Hudson

Long damp face
of a mountain. That mountain,

weather you can hide behind,
finding your face

in the shapes of clouds,
the sidelong glance of a stone,

falling. The moon is not the moon
when face to face

with the pond. The hailstorm
of your eyes. A petal

a kind of proof
floating between us.

The Season's First Complaint

Ashley Hudson

The horse steps on the infant rabbit.
What follows is all pink
foam and screams. The yellow-black
buzz sting kind of hyper in me.

Antique white car floating through the avenue,
the fallen fuchsia buds. Is winter
a memory I am choosing to forget?

The leaves hold onto so much
red and the clouds move
where they choose though
their shapes are mostly mine.

The horse is dragging hooves through the blood
drawing its dirigible in the dirt,
and the car opens its trunk wide
to show off my January slaughters.

I keep staring into kind weather
until my eyes bloom their bluest tears,

and the rabbit's silent scream moves
as heat's wicked wave off concrete,
until all the feral and macabre shifting drags itself

into hiding beyond the sweet flowers
where one might find the hand
offering such a strange gift as season.

Outage

Emma Borges-Scott

That night, at seven o'clock, first the lights and the music and fans and computers and microwaves went out, all along the street, like dominoes, or the rolling descent of a rollercoaster, or the whip of a snake's tail, one by one. Light fell from the windows like pearls off a necklace, in breaking.

It was darker and more silent than we'd ever known or remembered, and we asked each other, what do you think that was, a power shortage, then shifted to sit closer to each other, and I could hear your breath, and the rumbling of your stomach.

80

The people who were alone in their homes thought what to do, to read by the light of no lamp. Some went out and stood in the lawns and talked with their neighbors. "You too, huh?" and "It shouldn't last much longer...these things usually get fixed pretty quick."

More people went outside, to the whirl of the bicycles on the street, and the couple with the baby crying, and the cars moving tentatively, unsure without the lights' telling.

Then one by one the cars jolted stopped and all the batteries in all the flashlights dried, and that brought even more people out, to stand and wonder what this was.

An airplane fell from the sky, like it had just fallen asleep, and it burned on a field as the passengers exited to their screaming voices.

But there weren't flames anymore; the flames licked to blackness, and

the moon darkened like an eye closed after death and the stars were plucked away into a bouquet of nothing. The leaves stopped shivering.

Never was there such silence or stillness. People wondered if this was the end.

But still the birds were chirping and a cat was prowling, and together, outside, we stood stunned, wondering, waiting for what would happen next.

In Winter

Naomi Ayala

There's a gulf between me and *god*.
I fill it with angry fish
whose backs catch the sun.
I call across and listen for the wind,
watch tall snowdrifts
wrap around the cadaver boughs of trees.
When the gulf ices over
I sing out—sometimes to myself,
sometimes to the water beneath the ice.
There is always water waiting to be called back—
a whole world moving beneath ice—
even in my heart
weighed with the tundra of forgetting.

2 Poems

Naomi Ayala translating the Spanish of Luis Alberto Ambroggio

Vision

The sun, while it rises,
is all eyes.

Visión

El sol mientras sale
es todo ojos.

Vicissitude

The beauty of abysses
lies in their uncertainty.

Peripezia

La belleza de los abismos
está en su incertidumbre.

Contributors

A native of Puerto Rico, **Naomi Ayala** is the author of two books of poetry, *Wild Animals on the Moon* and *This Side of Early*. Her third book of poems will be published by Bilingual Review Press. Her translation of Argentinean poet Luis Alberto Ambroggio's most recent book of poems *The Wind's Archeology/La arqueología del viento* will be published by Vaso Roto Ediciones in Mexico. Naomi lives in Washington, DC where, until recently, she served as the founding Executive Director of 826DC. Distinguishing herself as a poet who writes in both Spanish and English, Naomi's most recent work in Spanish appears in *Al pie de la Casa Blanca: Poetas hispanos de Washington, DC* (North American Academy of the Spanish Language, 2010). Naomi is a member of the Board of the Directors of DC Advocates for the Arts.

An internationally known poet born in Argentina, **Luis Alberto Ambroggio** has lived in the Washington, DC area since 1967. His latest book, *The Wind's Archeology (La arqueología del viento)*, translated by Naomi Ayala, will be published this summer by Vaso Roto Ediciones (Mexico). He is also the author of eleven collections of poetry published in Argentina, Costa Rica, Spain, and the United States, and holds the honor of having been appointed a member of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language. Ambroggio's books of poetry *Laberintos de humo* (Tierra Firme, Buenos Aires, 2005) and *El testigo se desnuda* (Puerta de Alcalá, Madrid, 2002) have been widely praised in Europe, the United States and Latin America. His poetry and essays have appeared in the US and abroad in newspapers and journals, such as *Passport*, *Scholastic*, *International Poetry Review*, and *Hispanic Culture Review*.

Alma Baumwoll spent her childhood digging in the dirt for swarms, and still enjoys collecting bug spit. She writes poetry, teaches biology, and

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Emma Borges-Scott is a recent graduate of Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she was an Iowa Arts Fellow. She now lives in New York, and is completing her first novel.

Ann Cefola's translation of Hélène Sanguinetti's second book appears as *Hence this cradle* (*Seismicity Editions*, 2007). Ann is the author of *Sugaring* (*Dancing Girl Press*, 2007) and the forthcoming *St. Agnes, Pink-Slipped* (*Kattywompus Press*). She also received a 2007 Witter Bynner Poetry Translation Residency at the *Santa Fe Art Institute* and the 2001 Robert Penn Warren Award judged by John Ashbery.

Hélène Sanguinetti is the author of *De la main gauche, exploratrice* (*Flammarion*, 1999), *D'ici, de ce berceau* (*Flammarion*, 2003), *Alparegho, Pareil-à-rien* (*L'Act Mem*, 2005) and *Le Héros* (*Flammarion*, 2008). Her poetry also appears in *49 Poètes, un collectif* (*Flammarion*, 2004), *Du Pain, a collaboration with artist Anna Baranek* (*Espace Liberté*, 2006) and *L'Année Poétique 2005* (*Seghers*, 2006).

Mike Czagany lives in Iowa City, where he teaches creative writing under an assumed name. Other excerpts from this manuscript of translations of Venantius Fortunatus can be found in *Vanitas*, the *Notre Dame Review*, and *Action Yes*, with even more forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*.

Venantius Fortunatus (d. ca. 600 AD) was a poet, courtier, and eventually priest and bishop of Poitiers. His Latin poems and hymns, with their emphasis on paradox, repetition, assonance, and rhyme, exercised a deep

influence on European poetry throughout the Middle Ages. He has been venerated as a saint for many centuries, though not as much now as before.

Janis Freegard was born in England, but has lived in New Zealand most of her life. She writes fiction and poetry and is a past winner of the BNZ Katherine Mansfield Award. Her poetry collection, *Kingdom Animalia: the Escapades of Linnaeus*, will be published by Auckland University Press in May 2011. She blogs at <http://janisfreegard.wordpress.com>.

A. Kendra Greene is a Jacob K. Javits Fellow at the University of Iowa. She has vaccinated wild boars in Chile and modeled dresses twisted from balloons. She is currently looking for reasons to love Dallas, Texas. A writer and book artist, her work is in *The Best Women's Travel Writing 2010*, and the special collections of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and The University of Florida. And even as we speak, she is writing a memoir about museums. More at <http://greeneinkpress.com>

Ashley Elizabeth Hudson is from Athens, Alabama. She was awarded the *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* poetry prize. Her poems appear in *Six Little Things* and most recently in the *Southeast Review*.

Sarah McBee was born in a log cabin in West Virginia that she helped her father build. She now lives in Massachusetts.

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Patrick Swaney grew up in Michigan. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in the *Indiana Review*, *Conduit*, and *Redivider* among others.

Sarah Tourjee's fiction has appeared in the *Sonora Review* and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. She is pursuing an MFA at Brown University. She lives in Rhode Island with a herd of small nonhuman mammals and her human partner.

Henry Vauban writes in the Black Forest. His work is featured at places like *Gone Lawn*, *Necessary Fiction*, and *Short Fast and Deadly*. He blogs at [Vauban Inc.](#)

Eugenio Volpe has stories published or forthcoming in *New York Tyrant*, *Post Road*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Twelve Stories*, *Waccamaw*, and many others. He's been nominated for a Pushcart and won the PEN Discovery Award for his novel in progress. Recently, he won Boston's Literary Death Match, Episode 5. He blogs about Don DeLillo and surfing at [mebeing-brand.blogspot.com](#).

Anomalous Press

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At the time of its launch, Anomalous is an online publication, available in both visual and audio forms on various platforms. It has its sights set on publishing chapbooks, advancing audio forms and creation, and supporting all sorts of alternative realities of the near future.

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